

Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice—Stories from Chinese Heritage Language Learners

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Abstract

Using the concept of “figured world”, this paper explores the dynamics of Chinese heritage language education as ideology and practice in upstate New York. My main focus is on how Chinese American children, through learning and use of Chinese language, are able to construct, negotiate, and make sense of multiple selves across various socio-cultural contexts (school, family, community, and media). My findings illuminate that learning Chinese is not just for cultural retention or for ethnic pride. It also serves as an instrumental investment that allows these youths to have practical images, expectations, and self-actualizations that extend beyond temporal spatial limits. Thus, heritage language education involves multiple figured worlds, within which individuals’ identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically. As such, bilingualism for these immigrant children is not only a matter of ideologies in the Diaspora, but also a social practice of the imagination in global cultural processes.

Key words: heritage language, identity, ideology, practice, Chinese Diaspora

1. Introduction

As we enter the 21st century, we often find ourselves living in an increasingly globalized world, a world which is characterized by the global cultural flows of people, technologies, capital, media, and ideologies (Appadurai, 2008). As movement of people across geographical space problematizes national, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries, the trajectories of those people on the move, or their traces of mobility, become an important locus for the analysis of the lived experience of such people, for the indexes of one’s past trajectories constrain and reshape how one’s linguistic capital and social position will be evaluated (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005). Community-based heritage language (HL) education, which mainly serves to maintain heritage language and culture for Diaspora populations (Baker, 2006), offers a particularly interesting locus to track such global flows. This is because, by combining elements from family, community, and school, HL education provides a borderline case to study formal and informal bilingual education in this context of mobility.

Based on a larger ethnographic study of second-generation Chinese HL learners in upstate New York, this paper explores the dynamics of HL education in and out of classroom settings. My main focus is on how Chinese American children, through learning and use of Chinese language, are able to construct, negotiate, and make sense of multiple selves across various socio-cultural contexts (school, family, community, and media). First, I will discuss two concepts, *figured world* and *investment*, as my theoretical framework, to address bilingual education as ideology and practice (Heller 2007). This is followed by an introduction of the research context and the methodologies. Then, I will discuss to what extent and in which ways Chinese HL learning functions as both an ideological and an instrumental investment and how different figured worlds are constructed among these immigrant children. Finally, some educational implications will be presented based on the synthesis of the major findings.

2. Theoretical background

I use *figured world* to discuss Chinese American children’s bilingual education as ideology and practice.

This concept of *figured worlds* refers neither to *imagined communities* as both inherently limited and sovereign (Anderson, 1983), nor to *imagined places* as “displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places, or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality” (Gupta & Ferguson, 2002: 69), nor to *imagined worlds*, “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe (Appadurai, 2008:51). Instead, *figured worlds* are peopled by figures and characters who form collective ideas, images, and aspirations, and accordingly take various actions towards those collectively realized “as if” realms. It is within these culturally figured worlds that people’s identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically. As Holland et al. point out,

By “figured world”, then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. (Holland et al., 1998: 52)

In other words, the concept of “figured world” highlights the situated nature of identity and human agency. It is also concerned with the interactions of the global and the local, i.e. how globalizing processes exist in specific local contexts. Therefore, *figured world* offers a useful framework to study the dynamics of Chinese HL schools, as it provides a closer account of domains, practices, activities, and identities in the circuits of interconnections.

The second theoretical concept I adopt here is Peirce’s (1995) investment to depict language learners’ commitment to learning the target language. There are four advantages of using investment over motivation in analyzing HL learning. First, this approach considers language as a specific capital, a valuable resource to achieve social ends (Bourdieu, 1990). As Heller (1994) argues,

Language functions not only as an emblem of identity, but as a means in and of itself to define group boundaries and to regulate access to the resources which the group controls. As such, it becomes itself a valued resource, a form of symbolic capital worth fighting to preserve or to acquire. (p. 102)

Second, the concept of investment presupposes that language learners have the expectation that they will have a good return on their investment. As Peirce (1995) points out, “they will acquire a wide range of symbolic and material resources, which will in return increase the value of their cultural capital” (p. 17). Third, the notion of investment captures the evolving, dynamic relationship between language learners and the social world. In other words, investment implies that language learners constantly make sense of their identities in relation to language practice. Therefore, they are not ahistorical or unidimensional but have a complex social history. Last but not least, the use of investment over motivation provides a better scenario that language learners may have multiple desires, just like a portfolio, a collection of investments which are not independent but connected in various ways.

Unlike Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) and Gardner’s (1985) distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation in second language acquisition (SLA), I propose two kinds of investments, ideological and instrumental, in the context of HL learning (Lei, 2012). As mentioned earlier, since language is regarded as a specific capital, individuals will invest in language learning to acquire a wide range of symbolic and material resources. Accordingly, their various investments are mainly made along the ideological-instrumental dimension. Generally speaking, ideological investment refers to HL learners’ desires to maintain ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Instrumental investment references the desires that language learners learn their heritage language for utilitarian purposes such as employment.

Since research (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; He, 2006; Li & Duff, 2008; Lu & Li, 2008; Valdes, 2001; Wen, 2011) has demonstrated that HL learning differs significantly from first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition, ideological and instrumental investments better capture the set of complications and ambiguities involving HL learning. In particular, the use of ideological investment over integrative motivation implies that HL learners are not only hoping to embrace the target language and culture, but to develop a subjective identification of their cultural heritage with an ideology of a (at least imagined) shared history, unique past, and possibly a symbolic attachment with a homeland (Geertz, 1963). Although *figured world* and *investment* are presented as separate concepts, they are linked altogether when discussing HL learning and identity construction. I argue that investment mediates between the figured world and the material world.

It is within the figured world that individual learners come up with various ideologies, ideas, and aspirations about language (s) which leads to various degrees of commitment to language learning (investment). As a result of the individual's investment in phenomenological experiences, the linguistic aptitude/competence along with vitality beliefs and ethnic identification becomes the basis for the individual's language behaviors, which in turn influence the quality and quantity of the ethnolinguistic experiences. In addition, as investment highlights language learners as having a complex history and multiple desires, multiple figured worlds could be constructed across different settings (education support, interpersonal contacts, and media-based contacts), and they are not independent of one another but connected in various ways. Furthermore, both figured world and investment highlight learning as a collaborative effort, as learning is integrated into everyday social interactions in and through which we learn not only how to do certain things, but also whom we can be and become and as whom we can be recognized (Lave & Wenger 1991). Therefore, I argue that figured world and investment provide a useful framework to study the dynamic interactions between language, identity, and social environment.

3. Setting, data, and methods

Data presented in this paper were based on an 11-month ethnographic study of second-generation Chinese American adolescents' HL learning and language use along with identity formation processes in upstate New York. These children were either born in the United States or came to the United States with their parents at a very young age. Like other second-generation immigrants, most of these youngsters are already English-dominant, though some of them are bilingual in Chinese and English in the oral form. In order to maintain Chinese language skills as well as to retain cultural heritage, they are sent by their parents to attend the local Chinese HL school during the weekends. Both Chinese language classes and Chinese culture classes are offered there. In addition, some parents teach Chinese language and culture at home, such as reading Chinese stories, watching Chinese movies/TV programs, and practicing traditional Chinese calligraphy. Some children are also encouraged to participate in activities organized by the Chinese HL school and the local Chinese Community Center (CCC),¹ such as the annual Chinese New Year Celebration, the Storytelling Contest, and the International Festival. Overall, it is to improve their Chinese language proficiency and maintain their Chinese cultural identity that these children are engaged in various events/activities across different settings.

My fieldwork was divided into two stages: general/preliminary study and intensive case study with different objectives and procedures. The objective of my general/preliminary study was to get a rough understanding of the language/identity dynamics as well as the socio-cultural contexts in which my fieldwork was conducted. At first, I distributed a Language and Attitude Survey for all Chinese American students between Grade 4 and Grade 12.² This survey was designed to attain a general idea of these students' linguistic and social backgrounds. Eighty-four surveys were distributed and sixty-nine were finally returned. Next, I conducted informal interviews with some students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and other members of the CCC, to get their opinions on Chinese HL education from different perspectives. Furthermore, I went to each class from Grade 4 to Grade 10 (a total of eight classes) to observe classroom interactions between teachers and students.

After the general/preliminary study, I selected six focal informants (please see Table 1 as a brief summary of their background), based on convenience sampling, to explore their HL learning experiences. A sample of six was judged adequate to represent various linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences of the entire group. Participant observation and interview are my main ways of gathering data. I went to the local Chinese HL school every Sunday to observe and audio-tape classroom interactions. I also went to their homes to observe and audio-tape their interactions with family members as well as with the media (e.g., music, films, TV shows, and the Internet). In addition, I participated in different kinds of ethnic activities (e.g., a Chinese New Year Party), which offered me opportunities to observe the informants' behaviors in various settings. Furthermore, I conducted semi-structured interviews with these informants, their families, and Chinese teachers, which aimed to get additional information of their life stories from different perspectives. Last but not least, I also had interviews with their teachers at regular English schools, the objective of which was to make comparisons of their behaviors across different settings

¹ Different from traditional Chinese immigrant institutions/organizations founded in urban Chinatowns, the vast majority of its members are from middle-class families. This is because the New York State government, two major research universities, and various companies and businesses have attracted many Chinese professionals to work and live in the Capital Region.

² Younger children were not included in my survey because they might have difficulties in completing the survey.

In regard to data analysis, I did both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the survey and transcribed all tape-recorded interviews and observations. I also wrote biographic narrative texts for each focal informant based on conversations with them and their parents, teachers, and friends. In addition, some written documents, including homework, essays, diaries, exams, and teachers' reflections were also used to analyze students' language proficiency and attitudes towards Chinese culture. Generally speaking, participant observations aim to get first-hand data on how these Chinese American children are socialized through the INLC and what identity dynamics are embodied in moment-to-moment interactions to accrue spatial data, while interviews, life histories, and other documents have been used to solicit background information of a temporal nature to supplement observations. Then, I used both methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, surveys, and documents) and data triangulation (across time, space, and persons) to cross check whether there were some consistent patterns/themes coming out of these different sources of data (Denzin, 2006). As a result, idiomatic expressions, peer interactions, and media-based contacts are among the major recurrent factors that have played important roles in HL learning and socio-cultural development for these Chinese American children, which will be discussed in the next section.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Learning Chinese as ideological investment

The students in the Chinese school come from various backgrounds, and accordingly they have quite different purposes/reasons for learning Chinese. However, based on my observations and interviews, all parents and children agree, to various extents, that learning Chinese helps children to develop a strong and healthy sense of self. The meaning of "ideological investment", therefore, is straightforward: learning Chinese language enhances one's ethnic identity, because language is a symbolic capital, one of the most important components of one's identity. For example, Joy, one of my focal informants, has her interpretations as follows:

Learning a language is not simply about learning to speak, write, and read fluently or even passively. Languages are embodiments of the culture, traditions, of people to whom it belong to; they aid in defining people. Continuously evolving with the times, languages are forever adapting to fit the surroundings. Thus, learning Chinese is not about learning languages itself per se, but learning about, in my case as well as in numerous others, one's roots, one's history." (CCC Newsletter, Vol.28: 5, 2003)

Results from my language and attitude survey also show that Chinese heritage learners attach great importance to the active role of language in ethnic formation. In my survey, I have asked two questions on compositions of Chinese ethnicity (multiple choices are allowed). They aim to find out what the most important elements/components of being Chinese are. I have also asked another question about the role of Chinese language in maintaining ethnic identification (multiple choices are allowed). Figures 1, 2, & 3 show distributions of all answers to these three questions respectively.

In the first question, "what does it mean to you personally to be Chinese", as shown in Figure 1, 42% of participants chose "speaking good Chinese", next to the other two choices: "Understanding Chinese culture and history" (62.3%) and "Keeping Chinese traditions and lifestyles" (58%)³. In the second question, "If a person says that he/she is Chinese, what does it mean?", as shown in Figure 7.3, the percentage of participants who chose "He/she speaks good Chinese" (31.9%) again ranks No. 3, next to the other choices: "He/she understands Chinese culture and history" (50.7%) and "He/she keeps Chinese traditions and lifestyles" (50.7%). These results indicate that Chinese language, in these participants' minds, are among the most important ethnic markers of being Chinese, but not the top one. It also turns out that older participants have a higher percentage of choosing language as an integral part of one's ethnic identity.

In regards to the third question, "For people who have Chinese heritage but do not speak Chinese, which of the following are true?", two thirds (68.1%) chose "They can still be Chinese without speaking the language", which indicates a popular view that loss of heritage language does not mean loss of ethnic identity. Only 1/3 of the people chose "They lost Chinese values and traditions", which shows that there is still a concern among some people that loss of heritage language means an incomplete ethnic identity.

³Multiple choices are allowed; hence the total percentage is over 100%.

There is one 17 year old boy who wrote his own answer: “Twinkie, Wannabe, etc.”, which shows his sensibility to some derogatory terms associated with Asian Americans.

It also seems that older children have higher chances of choosing that answer “They lost Chinese values and traditions”. This means, as time goes on, children might gradually realize the important role of heritage language in maintaining one’s ethnicity. Here are three other remarks in the 2002-03 Year Book:

1. I like studying Chinese, and I like being together with my Chinese friends even more. ...Since I keep going to the Chinese School, I have learned not only many Chinese characters but also a lot of histories of our ancestors. Although I was born in the United States, I am a Chinese forever.
2. I am a Chinese, so I have to learn. ...There are over 1.2 billion people speaking Chinese all over the world. It's shameful if a Chinese guy cannot speak Chinese.
3. We feel that we are Chinese forever, and our roots are in China forever. Going to the Chinese School is a very good learning opportunity, and we must study Chinese very hard.

These students seem to realize that Chinese language and culture are crucial for being a Chinese, for they constitute a symbolic capital that clarifies the abstract Chinese identity.

As indicated above, language is not indispensable but very important and useful for ethnic identification. The central questions are to what extent and how heritage language facilitates positive ethnic identification. Here, I interpret the role of heritage language in ethnic identification in three ways. First, language per se is a part of culture. By studying the words and linguistic structures of a language, learners also acquire the socio-cultural information underlying the language system, which in turn, helps them to develop a deep emotional attachment to the shared heritage. For example, my case studies indicate that Chinese idiomatic expressions are windows to look into the Chinese past, which enhances ethnic pride. Second, heritage language provides important access to participation in ethnic activities and formation of group boundaries (Heller, 1994). It is through participating in and being exposed to various ethnic activities that children develop a strong sense of being a community, and the shared experience entails a “we-feeling”. For example, Linda’s close contacts with her cousins in Beijing helps her develop a deep attachment to Chinese popular culture (Chinese TVs, films, and music), in which Chinese language is a central means of making sense out of that shared experience. Last but not least, heritage language is an important ethnic boundary marker. Thus, learning and use of heritage language entails a distinction between one’s own “in-group” and another “out-group”. For example, Joy and Linda occasionally speak Chinese to each other and with their Chinese American friends at the high school to exclude “the others”, which, in turn, demonstrates their sensibility of manipulating their linguistic repertoires to display their unique ethnic identities.

4.2 Learning Chinese as instrumental investment

As mentioned before, the biggest challenge facing all Chinese heritage schools in the United States after World War II is finding effective methods to motivate Chinese Americans, especially American-born Chinese. Changed from sojourners to settlers, Chinese Americans are undergoing more intense acculturation than ever before. Acquiring at least the rudiments of Chinese language and culture is not a necessary skill for survival in American society. Some parents and students even consider learning Chinese as impediments to mainstream education. However, with the burgeoning Chinese economy during the past three decades, the situation is again changing slightly. More and more heritage language programs try to highlight the “instrumental investment”, the practical benefits brought out by learning the Chinese language.

For instance, the Chinese School brings up several points of why learning Chinese is very “cool” as follows (CCC Chinese School Year Book 2002-2003):

1. Chinese is the most commonly used language all over the world.
2. Chinese culture is one of the most glorious civilizations in human histories.
3. China might become the most powerful country in the future.
4. Learning Chinese could improve your personal business.
5. Going to the Chinese School enables you to have a lot of interesting friends.

By identifying these points, the school aims to convey two important pieces of information: 1) to help students establish a positive attitude towards China and Chinese culture; 2) to point out some practical aspects of going to the Chinese school.

My observations and interviews also show that these Chinese American students learn Chinese language and culture for various practical needs. Firstly, these immigrant children need to learn Chinese in order to communicate with their relatives and friends in the U.S. and in China. If they have grandparents living with them or if the family plans to go back to China, this communicative need is even more urgent. The following words of a 15 year old boy best demonstrate such practical needs:

Our family goes back to China every few years, and I want to talk with my cousins. In addition, I want to talk with people in Chinese stores. I want to understand Chinese movies. I also want to watch the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. My parents are always saying that no matter if you are going to college or looking for a job, it is necessary to speak Chinese.

Secondly, learning Chinese language opens up personal and professional opportunities. With the continuing booming economy of China, there are increased occasions to work and travel in China as well as to do business with Chinese speakers. Accordingly, being bilingual in both English and Chinese, the two most widely used languages in the world, offers these Chinese American children a competitive advantage in the global arena. Actually, many of them have realized this potential. For example, Linda wanted to be an interpreter for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Megan plans to work in China as an English teacher. And Joy's dream is even more ambitious: she aims to be the U.S. Ambassador to China.

Thirdly, learning Chinese also extends individuals' social networks. Some students mention that they have made a lot of good friends at the Chinese school, because they feel that it is easier for them to make friends with those who share similar cultural backgrounds. Whether they like or hate studying Chinese language and culture, they enjoy talking and playing with people of similar backgrounds. As a 12 year old boy says, "I don't like the Chinese school at all, but I can make many friends here." Intriguingly, some children have no interests in what the teachers are saying but would be very active during classroom activities. They cooperate with other classmates and even help them to complete some tasks. In addition, during the break or after the class, they would talk a lot with their peers. This friendly relationship seems to extend beyond the Chinese school. Many children become very close friends and keep contacts with each other very often.

Last but not least, learning Chinese language also enables these immigrant children to get access to Chinese popular culture (films, TV series, pop music, and fashion magazines). Five out of the six focal informants (except for Yichen) are investing in learning Chinese language in order to understand Chinese lyrics, watch Chinese films/TV series (especially related to historical events and martial arts) and track Chinese singers/movie stars, just as their counterparts in China are motivated to learn English in order to appreciate Hollywood movies and American pop music.

In response to the rising power of China, and accordingly its language, Chinese language education is becoming more and more important. It is estimated that there are over 2400 American public schools that plan to offer Chinese classes. Some local schools have facilitated collaborative efforts between regular schools and Chinese schools (Chang, 2003). With their wealth of experience, Chinese language schools are in an advantageous position to cooperate with local educational authorities in setting up Chinese language classes. There have also been instances of students receiving credits for studying at Chinese schools. In addition, the Chinese language has become one of the SAT II subjects for the college entrance examinations. All these new developments will provide more incentives for Chinese American students to learn Chinese.

4.3 Chinese heritage language education as figured worlds

According to what I have discussed in previous sections, people come to learn Chinese language and culture for different motivations, and they have various attitudes toward it. In other words, they keep in mind different images, ideologies, and expectations of being bilingual. The dynamics of learning Chinese go far beyond the feeling of nostalgia or the personal and cultural feelings of belonging to a nation-state, although many children go to the Chinese School just for heritage retention or forging connections with other Chinese fellows. It is not only the displaced who experience a displacement. Rather, it indicates, to a certain degree, illusions or reconstructions of the remembered homelands/heritage by the Chinese Diaspora as well as a set of complicated relationships with the host culture and the ethnic culture. Therefore, I argue that, in the post-modern era, heritage language education functions as *figured worlds* that extend beyond temporal spatial limits (Lei, 2011).

The word *figured* has three implications. First, it denotes the historical dimension of heritage language education. As noted throughout the world, Chinese people are more inclined than most other ethnic groups to keep the home culture after emigration overseas for years. The numerous Chinatowns all over the world are prime examples of Chinese people's nostalgia. Building Chinese schools is another attempt to preserve the heritage culture, since heritage language is another very important symbolic capital to revitalize and clarify one's ethnic identity (Heller, 1994). Second, similar to Anderson's, Appadurai's and Gupta & Ferguson's ideas, "figured" implies the illusion or the reconstruction of the remembered homelands by these Chinese immigrants. Thus, there is a distinction between the real homeland in the physical world and the imagined one in the inner mind. Third, it conveys the difference between people's anticipations for the Chinese heritage language education and the actual realization of it.

The meaning of *world* is also two-fold. First, it represents the physical existence of the Chinese School, the Chinese Community Center, and home where learning activities are mainly taking place on a regular basis. Second, heritage language learning extends beyond this temporal spatial limit, since it also occurs in other places during other periods of time. For example, when exploring the bilingual website (virtual space) or reading signs on a street in Beijing (unexpected setting), these children are also involved in learning. Thus, *figured world* captures the situated nature of learning.

As discussed before, Chinese heritage language education has different meanings for students from various backgrounds. Accordingly, multiple figured worlds could be constructed along time and across space. Along with various images, ideas, and expectations configured within these multiple figured worlds, these heritage language learners make commitments to language learning to different extents. Here I would like to briefly address the possible transition from passive investments to active ones. Most young children do not like attending Chinese language and culture classes per se, but enjoy making friends with other students. The major reason for their dislike of the classes may be the fact that they are surrounded by and socialized by the English-dominant American culture or that the Chinese language and culture are too difficult for them to learn. In spite of the reluctance, many children still keep going to Chinese school, simply because their parents ask them to do so. In this sense, it is their parents who force these children to make investment in language learning. As time passes by, this passive pattern of investment might go through certain forms of transformation.

The stories of Megan, Linda, and Joy are good examples of this transition. Their life histories are similar in that they used to "hate", or at least get frustrated with their Chinese heritage in the earlier stages of their school years, but all of them ended up stepping out of that frustration and acquiring a positive understanding of their self-identity. All of them agree that going to Chinese language school plays a crucial role in this ethnic revitalization. As Linda says, "We go to Chinese school every Sunday and get our heads filled with 'Chinese'. In learning the language, we are learning what it means to be Chinese". Megan also mentions to me that, "At the school, I routinely see Chinese Americans, and especially Chinese-American women in positions of respect and authority. These are important role models. Through dance classes, I also experience the grace and strength of Chinese-American women."

In addition, their networking with friends in China or in the U.S. also makes them emotionally attached to their Chinese heritage. Take Megan and Linda for example. It is their close contacts with cousins in China that give them access to updated information on Chinese movies, music, and fashions, which in turn increases their exposure to Chinese culture. Joy is also influenced by her good friend in the U.S. to listen to Chinese pop music. All of them are also inclined to make Asian friends who share similar cultural backgrounds. In particular, Linda and Joy were brought up together with a few Chinese American kids and have maintained an "Asian gathering" at their high school, which indicates a strong sensibility of their ethnic identity.

Furthermore, these girls' parents' strong desires to socialize them in the Chinese environment also account for their strong commitment to language learning. For instance, as a leader of the Chinese Community Center, Joy's father encourages Joy and her younger sister to participate in various ethnic activities. It is through service and volunteer work for the Chinese community that Joy feels self-actualized. By contrast, Megan's and Linda's parents send children back to China every summer, which makes them learn and practice Chinese in a natural setting. It also gives them opportunities to see China's changes with their own eyes, which helps them to develop a positive attitude toward China and Chinese culture.

Finally, all these three girls realize that, from a utilitarian point of view, it is advantageous to be bilingual and bicultural. Linda wants to be an interpreter for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Megan's dream job is to work in China as an English teacher. Joy's plan is to be the U.S. Ambassador to China. In other words, they are not only being proud of their bicultural background but also consider learning Chinese language and culture as an investment in their career opportunities.

Their stories illustrate how multiple figured worlds are constructed through their lived experiences and how ideological and instrumental investments are intertwined to influence their linguistic and socio-cultural development. To put it in a simple way, these Chinese American children's various investments mediate between their figured worlds and their linguistic and socio-cultural development: it is their consistent learning and use of Chinese that enables them to be socialized in various contexts, which helps to establish ethnic belongingness; on the other hand, their strong ethnic identifications incline them to certain phenomenological experience, which in turn facilitates their learning and use of Chinese.

However, learning and use of heritage language does not necessarily lead to homogeneous ethnic identity. Yichen's life trajectory illuminates a more complex story of heritage language leaning and identity construction. His parents told me that he was originally forced to learn Chinese, and this situation was slightly changed from two years ago. He is right now considering going to Chinese School as a routine, although he is not necessarily enthusiastic in learning Chinese language and culture. Yichen is the only one, among the six cases, who was born in China and still keeps a Chinese passport. It is mainly because of this reason that he identifies himself as "Chinese". He is also the only one, among the six informants, who does not watch Chinese movies and explore Chinese or bilingual websites. Due to his isolation from his parents within the past few years, Yichen talks less and less with his parents. His experience with Chinese language and culture is only confined to the Chinese school and 2-3 hours of doing Chinese homework and previewing Chinese texts right before going to the Chinese school. Yichen visited his hometown in Northwestern China for just one week, so he has a vague impression of China. However, Yichen seems to be enthusiastic in displaying his ethnic identity in his regular high school. For example, he participated in the International Club where he organized a Chinese Information Booth to display crafts and calligraphy at the 2006 Cultural Fair. Yichen's case is a little bit complicated in that on the one hand his continuing study of Chinese language and culture and his active participation in multicultural events at his regular school moves him towards a positive ethnic identification; on the other hand, Yichen's isolation from his parents and decreasing time spent in heritage education might make this initial ethnic rebirth pause or go the opposite way. However, bilingual and bicultural development is a dynamic process. The final result for Yichen in the future will eventually depend on various factors.

To sum up, these six case studies suggest that these immigrant children are not simply the combination of being Chinese and American, but rather the sum of their personal experiences. By interacting within different social networks through time and across space, immigrant children may display different relationships to their ethnic group and different senses of being a minority (Jo, 2002). Thus, Chinese American students can be located on a continuum of "Chineseness" and "Americanness" along with their various levels of investment in heritage language learning.

5. Conclusion

This paper is a brief discussion of my ethnographic study of the dynamics of Chinese heritage language education in upstate New York. My findings illuminate that learning Chinese is not just for cultural retention or for ethnic pride. It also serves as an instrumental investment that allows these youths to have practical images, expectations, and self-actualizations that extend beyond temporal spatial limits. Thus, heritage language education involves multiple figured worlds, within which individuals' identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically. As such, bilingualism for these immigrant children is not only a matter of ideologies in the Diaspora, but also a social practice of the imagination in global cultural processes (Appadurai, 2008). By exploring the confrontations and conduits holding between immigrants and 'host' societies, language ideologies and identity positions, immigrant institutions and community-based school practices, this paper sheds some light on the research of the intersections of language, power, identity, and ideology in the increasingly globalized world. To conclude, I would like to discuss some educational implications of this study. As indicated in above discussions, heritage language learners bring with them various ideas, images, and expectations of learning Chinese language.

Accordingly, the heritage language educational programs should take into consideration all these needs and wants to get these students more involved in the process of learning. A few suggestions are provided as follows:

1. The Chinese heritage language school should develop more extracurricular activities for students to practice their Chinese as well as to fuel an interest in learning. For example, story-telling contests are good for younger children to improve their oral presentation skills. Chinese skits or comedy might be appropriate for older learners to improve their pragmatic and cultural knowledge in Chinese.
2. The Chinese heritage language school, in addition to language classes, should also offer a variety of China-related courses. For example, a class on the history of Chinese Americans might provide students with an appropriate understanding of who they are and how they are related to their heritage and host country. A class on contemporary China might also help children to develop a positive attitude toward China and Chinese culture.
3. Parents should insist on speaking Chinese to their children, because this is the only way in which children could keep practicing Chinese on a regular basis. Parents should also create as many opportunities as possible to expose their children to Chinese culture. For example, they could send children to China to attend a summer school or just be with their relatives/friends. They could also encourage children to do volunteer work in a local Chinese community.
4. Chinese teachers and parents should encourage children to watch age-appropriate Chinese movies/TV series during holidays/vacations. If possible, teachers could incorporate this into their curricula. They could also encourage children to use the Internet as an alternative way of learning Chinese language and culture.
5. The larger society should facilitate more collaborative efforts between regular schools and Chinese schools⁴. With their wealth of experience, Chinese language schools are in an advantageous position to cooperate with local educational authorities in setting up Chinese language classes. There have also been instances of receiving credits for studying at Chinese schools. The Chinese language has also become one of the subjects of SAT II to satisfy college-entrance foreign-language requirements. All these new developments will provide more incentives for Chinese American students to learn Chinese.

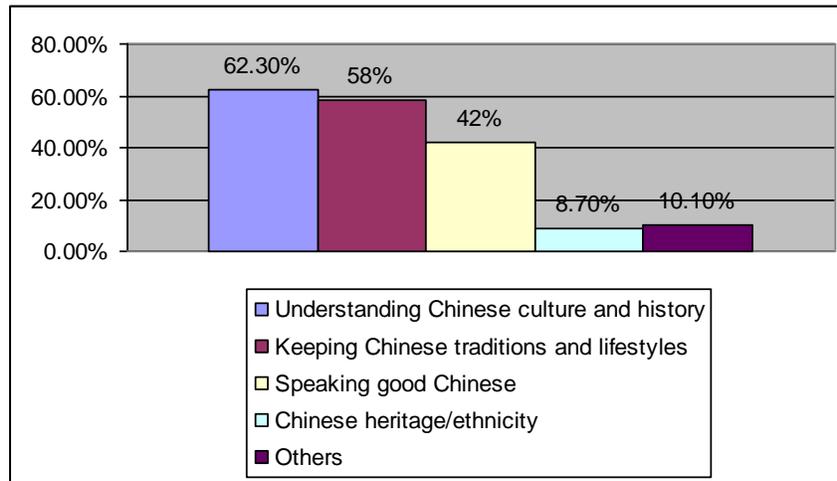
On the whole, my key point is that the task of maintaining heritage language and culture does not rest on the shoulders of only one party. The combination of efforts from individuals, parents, teachers, schools, and the larger society will definitely bring about the most satisfactory result.

Table 1 Background Information of 6 Focal Informants

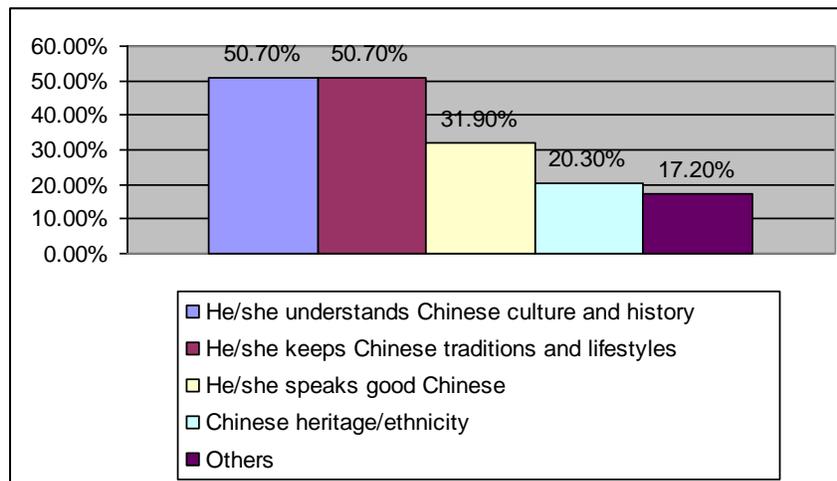
Name ⁵	Age	Gender	Years in the U.S.	Grade level in the Chinese School	Years in the Chinese School
Judy	11	Girl	Born in the U.S.	7 th grade	4
Alex	13	Boy	Born in the U.S.	7 th grade	3
Megan	14	Girl	Born in the U.S.	9 th grade	6
Yichen	16	Boy	11	10 th grade	5
Joy	17	Girl	Born in the U.S.	Graduated	9
Linda	17	Girl	Born in the U.S.	Graduated	10

⁵ To keep the confidentiality of the informants, all names are pseudonyms.

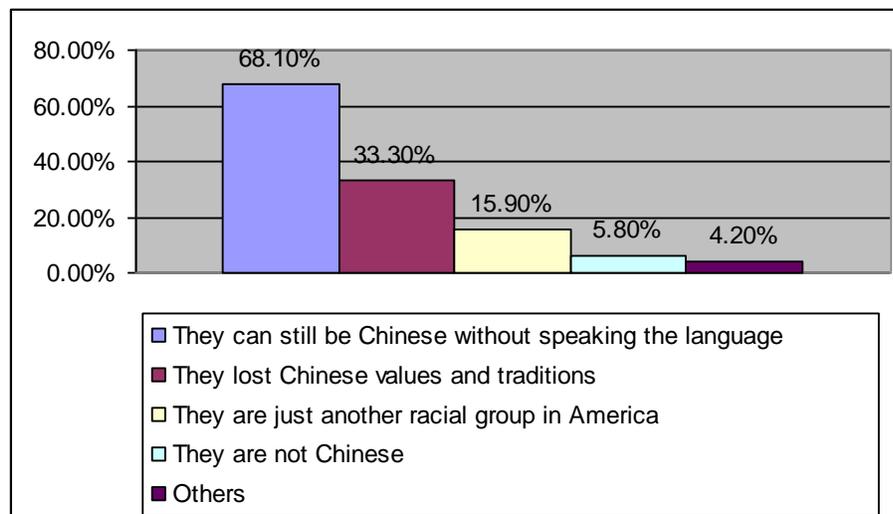
**Figure 1 Distribution of Answers to the Question:
What does it mean to you personally to be Chinese?**



**Figure 2 Distribution of Answers to the Question:
If a person says that he/she is Chinese, what does it mean?**



**Figure 3 Distribution of Answers to the Question:
For people who have Chinese heritage but do not speak Chinese, which of the following are true?**



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